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Autonomy as a moderator of psychological phenomenon

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) differentiates the concept of motivation into autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation involves acting with a sense of willingness, volition, and choice, and leads to more openness, effectiveness, and wellness, whereas controlled motivation involves acting with a sense of pressure, tension, and obligation, and leads to more defensive, manipulative, and algorithmic performing. In this presentation, I will discuss studies that have shown that when people are more controlled in their motivation they evidence various negative and defensive phenomena (e.g., terror management defending; unrelated implicit and explicit states; ego-depletion; and high-standards perfectionistic outcomes), but when they are more autonomous (or mindful) they display more positive outcomes (e.g., effective processing of terror, highly correlated implicit and explicit states; and vitalization rather than depletion. Similarly, people high in controlled motivation resist integrating negative life events but people high in autonomous motivation do integrate their negative life events.

Biography

Edward L Deci is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Rochester, and director of its human motivation program. He is well known in psychology for his theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and basic psychological needs. With Richard Ryan, he is the co-founder of self-determination theory (SDT), an influential contemporary motivational theory. Self-determination theory is a macro theory of human motivation that differentiates between autonomous and controlled forms of motivation; the theory has been applied to predict behavior and inform behavior change in many contexts including: education, health care, work organizations, parenting, and sport (as well as many others)

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